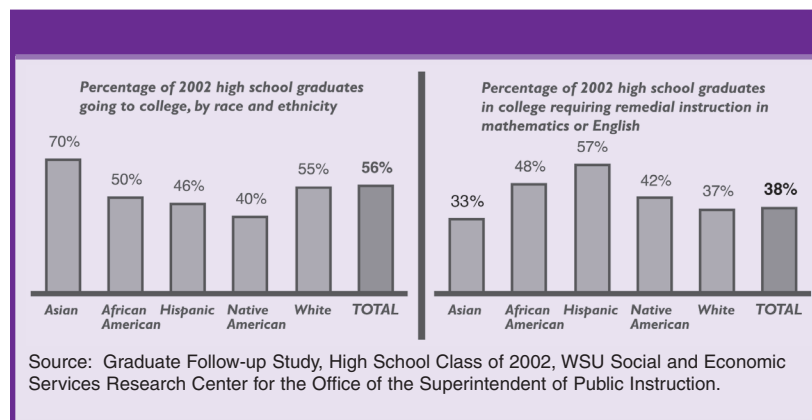


8 HELPING STUDENTS MAKE THE TRANSITION TO COLLEGE

Overview

Every year, large numbers of Washington students graduate from high school unprepared for college study or, many would argue, the workplace. Fifty-six percent of students who graduated from high school in 2002 enrolled in a Washington public two-year or four-year college or university within one year of graduation. Of those students, 38 percent required remedial mathematics or English courses.



Inadequate preparation in high schools takes an even greater toll on African American, Hispanic, and Native American students. Students from these groups in the high school class of 2002 were significantly less likely than their White or Asian peers to go on to college within a year of graduation and more likely to require remedial instruction when they enrolled. Higher education shoulders much of the cost of this lack of preparation.

The state higher education system must take a leadership role in developing a systemic solution to the problem of poor preparation. The Higher Education Coordinating Board proposes to collaborate with state K-12 and higher education systems to accomplish the following key initiatives:

- Develop a comprehensive definition of college readiness;
- Establish statewide student learning outcomes for grades 11 and 12 that are required for success in postsecondary study;
- Expand effective models that promote K-12/higher education collaboration and prepare students for college success; and
- Communicate with students, families, and schools the requirements of a rigorous high school education that will lead to successful postsecondary study and careers.

These initiatives will help students prepare for higher education with a clear understanding of the knowledge and abilities required for success and the confidence that their high school coursework will be enough to gain them admission and prepare them for the rigors of college work.

Key outcomes of this proposal include (1) an increase in the number of students who are ready for postsecondary study and (2) the establishment of the critical groundwork to improve instruction, teacher training and development, and guidance counseling; reduce remediation at state colleges and universities; and narrow the achievement gap.

Analysis

The board envisions an integrated and barrier-free system of education from preschool through the fourth year of college. Washington students would move quickly and easily between educational levels and across sectors. Such a system would ensure adequate teacher preparation and ongoing professional development, timely and meaningful student counseling, continuous improvements in assessment and accountability, and a host of other endeavors.

Building this system will take time and effort and the will and commitment of all of the state's education stakeholders. By necessity, an integrated system must begin with efforts to define the knowledge and abilities students need at high school graduation in order to succeed in postsecondary study.

A definition of college readiness

The state has not done well in defining or communicating what students must know and be able to do to succeed in college. Current state minimum basic admission standards are not an accurate definition of college readiness. These standards, first adopted in the 1980s, place an undue emphasis on "seat time" and grades – expecting students to complete a set of required courses without appropriate concern for the content or instructional quality of those courses. Furthermore, few students who meet only the minimum requirements today are even competitive for admission to the state's four-year colleges.

The board seeks a new definition of college readiness to replace the state's current minimum basic admission standards. This definition, developed through collaboration between the K-12 and higher education systems, would emphasize the critical knowledge and abilities that students need for college success. It would align requirements for college success with the learning outcomes emphasized in K-12 reform. Finally, it would provide the information that students and schools must have – information that is missing in the current system – to address curriculum and instruction needs for college preparation.

Collaboration to establish 11th and 12th grade learning outcomes

Washington will cross a watershed in its school reform efforts when students in the class of 2008 must meet 10th grade standards to earn a Certificate of Academic Achievement in order to graduate from high school. Most students will need to demonstrate mastery of those standards by passing the 10th grade Washington Assessment of Student Learning.

The higher education and K-12 systems now must work together to develop statewide learning outcomes for the 11th and 12th grades – based on a new definition of college readiness – to ensure that students have the knowledge and abilities required for college and the workforce. And the state must ensure that students preparing for study beyond high school – the majority of students – have the information, instruction, and curriculum they will need to bridge the gap between 10th grade learning outcomes and readiness for postsecondary success.

A catalog of effective practices

Programs that allow high school students to earn college credit – International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement, Early and Middle College High Schools, and Running Start – have achieved considerable successes. Initiatives like GEAR UP, TRIO, Washington State Achievers, and Washington Opportunity Scholars have helped motivate and prepare low-income and first-generation students for higher education.

These efforts offer instructive approaches to addressing the need for more rigorous college preparation but are limited in their ability to reach students. The challenge for Washington is to diffuse these successful efforts throughout the state's educational system so that the instruction and services they offer will be available to all students who need them. But, policy makers in the state must first understand the extent, costs, and services of these diverse initiatives in order to determine which of them might be good candidates for expansion.

Communications with students, families, and schools

These initiatives will succeed only to the degree that they are understood and accepted by students, their families, and educators. The move toward an improved transition from high school to college must be transparent, offer frequent and appropriate opportunities for public comment, and be accompanied by a well-orchestrated public information campaign aimed at students, parents, and schools.

Implementation Plan

1. The HECB will lead a collaborative effort with the goal of developing a definition of college readiness in the key subject areas of mathematics, science, English, social studies, world languages, and the arts.

By August 2005, an advisory committee of state policy makers, K-12 and higher education administrators and faculty, and representatives of the private sector will submit to the HECB recommended strategies for developing a definition of college readiness for Washington. The committee will take into account existing state and national college readiness standards. Strategies will address the need to align the state's definition of college readiness with existing school reform efforts.

In September 2005, the HECB will issue a work plan for the state to adopt a comprehensive definition of college readiness.

By June 2006, the advisory committee and work groups will publish draft definitions of college readiness in mathematics, science, English, social studies, and world languages.

In December 2006, the HECB will adopt final definitions following public review.

Performance measures

The advisory committee charged with developing the definition of college readiness will determine performance measures.

Estimated costs

The HECB will absorb the costs of convening the advisory group. HECB staff will estimate further costs for special projects after the board issues its work plan in September 2005.

Examples of ongoing related work

- Numerous state and national efforts to define college readiness are now underway or have been recently completed, including the Transition Mathematics Project, a multi-sector initiative in Washington to develop and communicate readiness standards for college-level mathematics; the HECB's Competency-based Admissions Project, which ended in 2001; college-level writing competencies under development by two-year college faculty; and the American Diploma Project, a national initiative to infuse rigorous academic standards and college and workplace preparation into high school curricula.

- Several organizations are engaged in outreach and advocacy about the importance of rigorous high school preparation for college. In Washington, state education agencies have joined private-sector groups like the Washington Roundtable and the Partnership for Learning to call for high standards and high achievement for all students.

2. The HECB will support the efforts of the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to develop guidelines that identify the knowledge and abilities high school students must gain in grades 11 and 12 to be ready for college.

Performance measures

Timely completion and dissemination of 11th and 12th grade preparation guidelines to public and private K-12 schools statewide.

Estimated costs

The Superintendent of Public Instruction has the authority to develop learning outcomes for each grade level. The board supports the Superintendent's requests for state funds to complete this work.

Examples of ongoing related work

- An interdepartmental work group developing mathematics expectations for grades 11 and 12 has formed and will begin meeting after the Transition Mathematics Project issues its college readiness standards in early 2005.
- OSPI has continued to develop and disseminate "grade-level expectations" for reading, mathematics, science, writing, health and fitness, and the arts through grade 10.

3. The HECB will document the variety of college preparation programs administered in Washington State. The HECB will publish its research findings with analysis and options for expanding the reach of these efforts.

By September 2005, the HECB will publish a report on promising state and national college preparation practices, including dual-credit, early awareness, tutoring, mentoring, teacher development, curriculum alignment, and parent advocacy programs. The HECB will identify these promising practices, in collaboration with the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and public and private colleges and universities

Beginning in January 2005, the HECB will biennially provide progress reports on increasing dual-credit opportunities.

Performance measure

- The number of students who concurrently earn high school and college credit over 2003-04 levels.

Estimated costs

The HECB will absorb the costs of developing the inventory of effective practices. Costs associated with developing additional dual-credit opportunities and college outreach programs will be identified and presented to the legislature with board analysis and recommendations.

Examples of ongoing related work

- The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges reports annually on enrollments, student progress, and state funding efficiencies related to the Running Start program – the state’s largest dual-credit program.
- Several agencies, including the HECB, are collaborating to develop recommendations for reducing college remedial instruction. This group presented its report in December 2004.
- The Superintendent of Public Instruction administers a program to develop more Advanced Placement programs in the state’s high schools.
- Programs such as GEAR UP, TRIO, Opportunity Scholars, Gates Achiever Scholars, and numerous campus-based programs promote early college awareness and readiness, support student planning and academic achievement, provide teacher development, or align high school and college curricula. These programs serve tens of thousands of Washington students in middle school and high school.
- In January 2005, the board will address dual-credit opportunities in a report to the legislature on high school-college transition issues, as directed in House Bill 3103.

4. The HECB will conduct communications and outreach efforts to educate students, parents, and educators about the new college preparation requirements.

By September 2005, the HECB will develop and, assuming the availability of adequate resources, execute a communications strategy to inform students, parents, educators, and the public about the development and implementation of new standards.

Following the 2004-05 academic year, the HECB will collaborate with colleges, universities, and state agencies to improve feedback to high schools about the performance in postsecondary education of their recent graduates. Strategies will include publicizing the percentage of students from each high school who enroll in postsecondary programs, persist in their studies, and require remedial instruction.

Beginning in January 2005, the board will work with the Superintendent of Public Instruction and other interested parties to provide early college planning information to every middle and high school student in the state.

Performance measures

- Increased high school offerings of college-preparation curricula.
- Increased high school enrollment in college preparatory courses.
- Decreased remedial instruction for recent high school graduates.

Estimated costs

The HECB will identify the costs and possible sources of funds to carry out the communication strategies.

Examples of ongoing related work

- Several existing programs – GEAR UP, TRIO, and others – provide college planning information and support to middle and high school students. Specifically, the state GEAR UP project has developed comprehensive college planning handbooks for students in the 6th through 12th grades.
- The Washington Council on High School-College Relations, a statewide organization of high school counselors and admissions officers, provides forums to improve students' transition from high school to college.
- The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges collects and reports remediation enrollments for the state's two-year colleges. Washington State University's Graduate Follow-Up Study provides remediation information about students at the state's four-year colleges.

